

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Transcript: President Bush Address to the Nation on the War on Terror.....	1
Rice Cautious About Iranian Nuclear Proposal.....	3
Rice Cites Importance of U.S.-Canada Trade Agenda, Relations	4
Understanding the Threat from Terrorism Has Helped Undermine It	5
U.S. Treasury Officials Report on Blocking Terrorists' Money	5
U.S. Hopes To Raise U.N. Reform, Human Rights at U.N. Meeting	6
Pluralistic Democracy Protects Religious Freedom.....	8
Transcript: State Department Deputy Spokesman's Daily Briefing	9

Transcript: President Bush Address to the Nation on the War on Terror

To protect our nation, the building of the Middle East holds the key to peace, says Bush

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
September 11, 2006

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NATION**

The Oval Office

THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. Five years ago, this date -- September the 11th -- was seared into America's memory. Nineteen men attacked us with a barbarity unequalled in our history. They murdered people of all colors, creeds, and nationalities -- and made war upon the entire free world. Since that day, America and her allies have taken the offensive in a war unlike any we have fought before. Today, we are safer, but we are not yet safe. On this solemn night, I've asked for some of your time to discuss the nature of the threat still before us, what we are doing to protect our nation, and the building of a more hopeful Middle East that holds the key to peace for America and the world.

On 9/11, our nation saw the face of evil. Yet on that awful day, we also witnessed something distinctly American: ordinary citizens rising to the occasion, and responding with extraordinary acts of courage. We saw courage in office workers who were trapped on the high floors of burning skyscrapers -- and called home so that their last words to their families would be of comfort and love. We saw courage in passengers aboard Flight 93, who recited the 23rd Psalm -- and then charged the cockpit. And we saw courage in the Pentagon staff who made it out of the flames and smoke -- and ran back in to answer cries for help. On this day, we remember the innocent who lost their lives -- and we pay tribute to those who gave their lives so that others might live.

For many of our citizens, the wounds of that morning are still fresh. I've met firefighters and police officers who choke up at the memory of fallen comrades. I've stood with families gathered on a grassy field in Pennsylvania, who take bittersweet pride in loved ones who refused to be victims -- and gave America our first victory in the war on terror. I've sat beside young mothers with children who are now five years old -- and still long for the daddies who will never cradle them in their arms. Out of this suffering, we resolve to honor every man and woman lost. And we seek their lasting memorial in a safer and more hopeful world.

Since the horror of 9/11, we've learned a great deal about the enemy. We have learned that they are evil and kill without mercy -- but not without purpose. We have learned that they form a global network of extremists who are driven by a perverted vision of Islam -- a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom, rejects tolerance, and despises all dissent. And we have learned that their goal is to build a radical Islamic empire where women are prisoners in their homes, men are beaten for missing prayer meetings, and terrorists have a safe haven to plan and launch attacks on America and other civilized nations. The war against this enemy is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century, and the calling of our generation.

Our nation is being tested in a way that we have not been since the start of the Cold War. We saw what a handful of our enemies can do with box-cutters and plane tickets. We hear their threats to launch even more terrible attacks on our people. And we know that if they were able to get their hands on weapons of mass destruction, they would use them against us. We face an enemy determined to bring death and suffering into our homes. America did not ask for this war, and every American wishes it were over. So do I. But the war is not over -- and it will not be over until either we or the extremists emerge victorious. If we do not defeat these enemies now, we will leave our children to face a Middle East overrun by terrorist states and radical dictators armed with nuclear weapons. We are in a war that will set the course for this new century -- and determine the destiny of millions across the world.

For America, 9/11 was more than a tragedy -- it changed the way we look at the world. On September the 11th, we resolved that we would go on the offense against our enemies, and we would not distinguish between the terrorists and those who harbor or support them. So we helped drive the Taliban from power in Afghanistan. We put al Qaeda on the run, and killed or captured most of those who planned the 9/11 attacks, including the man believed to be the mastermind, Khalid Sheik Mohammed. He and other suspected terrorists have been questioned by the Central Intelligence Agency, and they provided valuable information that has helped stop attacks in America and across the world. Now these men have been transferred to Guantanamo Bay, so they can be held to account for their actions. Osama bin Laden and other terrorists are still in hiding. Our message to them is clear: No matter how long it takes, America will find you, and we will bring you to justice.

On September the 11th, we learned that America must confront threats before they reach our shores, whether those threats come from terrorist networks or terrorist states. I'm often asked why we're in Iraq when Saddam Hussein was

not responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The answer is that the regime of Saddam Hussein was a clear threat. My administration, the Congress, and the United Nations saw the threat -- and after 9/11, Saddam's regime posed a risk that the world could not afford to take. The world is safer because Saddam Hussein is no longer in power. And now the challenge is to help the Iraqi people build a democracy that fulfills the dreams of the nearly 12 million Iraqis who came out to vote in free elections last December.

Al Qaeda and other extremists from across the world have come to Iraq to stop the rise of a free society in the heart of the Middle East. They have joined the remnants of Saddam's regime and other armed groups to foment sectarian violence and drive us out. Our enemies in Iraq are tough and they are committed -- but so are Iraqi and coalition forces. We're adapting to stay ahead of the enemy, and we are carrying out a clear plan to ensure that a democratic Iraq succeeds.

We're training Iraqi troops so they can defend their nation. We're helping Iraq's unity government grow in strength and serve its people. We will not leave until this work is done. Whatever mistakes have been made in Iraq, the worst mistake would be to think that if we pulled out, the terrorists would leave us alone. They will not leave us alone. They will follow us. The safety of America depends on the outcome of the battle in the streets of Baghdad. Osama bin Laden calls this fight "the Third World War" -- and he says that victory for the terrorists in Iraq will mean America's "defeat and disgrace forever." If we yield Iraq to men like bin Laden, our enemies will be emboldened; they will gain a new safe haven; they will use Iraq's resources to fuel their extremist movement. We will not allow this to happen. America will stay in the fight. Iraq will be a free nation, and a strong ally in the war on terror.

We can be confident that our coalition will succeed because the Iraqi people have been steadfast in the face of unspeakable violence. And we can be confident in victory because of the skill and resolve of America's Armed Forces. Every one of our troops is a volunteer, and since the attacks of September the 11th, more than 1.6 million Americans have stepped forward to put on our nation's uniform. In Iraq, Afghanistan, and other fronts in the war on terror, the men and women of our military are making great sacrifices to keep us safe. Some have suffered terrible injuries -- and nearly 3,000 have given their lives. America cherishes their memory. We pray for their families. And we will never back down from the work they have begun.

We also honor those who toil day and night to keep our homeland safe, and we are giving them the tools they need to protect our people. We've created the Department of Homeland Security. We have torn down the wall that kept

law enforcement and intelligence from sharing information. We've tightened security at our airports and seaports and borders, and we've created new programs to monitor enemy bank records and phone calls. Thanks to the hard work of our law enforcement and intelligence professionals, we have broken up terrorist cells in our midst and saved American lives.

Five years after 9/11, our enemies have not succeeded in launching another attack on our soil, but they've not been idle. Al Qaeda and those inspired by its hateful ideology have carried out terrorist attacks in more than two dozen nations. And just last month, they were foiled in a plot to blow up passenger planes headed for the United States. They remain determined to attack America and kill our citizens -- and we are determined to stop them. We'll continue to give the men and women who protect us every resource and legal authority they need to do their jobs.

In the first days after the 9/11 attacks I promised to use every element of national power to fight the terrorists, wherever we find them. One of the strongest weapons in our arsenal is the power of freedom. The terrorists fear freedom as much as they do our firepower. They are thrown into panic at the sight of an old man pulling the election lever, girls enrolling in schools, or families worshiping God in their own traditions. They know that given a choice, people will choose freedom over their extremist ideology. So their answer is to deny people this choice by raging against the forces of freedom and moderation. This struggle has been called a clash of civilizations. In truth, it is a struggle for civilization. We are fighting to maintain the way of life enjoyed by free nations. And we're fighting for the possibility that good and decent people across the Middle East can raise up societies based on freedom and tolerance and personal dignity.

We are now in the early hours of this struggle between tyranny and freedom. Amid the violence, some question whether the people of the Middle East want their freedom, and whether the forces of moderation can prevail. For 60 years, these doubts guided our policies in the Middle East. And then, on a bright September morning, it became clear that the calm we saw in the Middle East was only a mirage. Years of pursuing stability to promote peace had left us with neither. So we changed our policies, and committed America's influence in the world to advancing freedom and democracy as the great alternatives to repression and radicalism.

With our help, the people of the Middle East are now stepping forward to claim their freedom. From Kabul to Baghdad to Beirut, there are brave men and women risking their lives each day for the same freedoms that we enjoy.

And they have one question for us: Do we have the confidence to do in the Middle East what our fathers and grandfathers accomplished in Europe and Asia? By standing with democratic leaders and reformers, by giving voice to the hopes of decent men and women, we're offering a path away from radicalism. And we are enlisting the most powerful force for peace and moderation in the Middle East: the desire of millions to be free.

Across the broader Middle East, the extremists are fighting to prevent such a future. Yet America has confronted evil before, and we have defeated it -- sometimes at the cost of thousands of good men in a single battle. When Franklin Roosevelt vowed to defeat two enemies across two oceans, he could not have foreseen D-Day and Iwo Jima -- but he would not have been surprised at the outcome. When Harry Truman promised American support for free peoples resisting Soviet aggression, he could not have foreseen the rise of the Berlin Wall -- but he would not have been surprised to see it brought down. Throughout our history, America has seen liberty challenged, and every time, we have seen liberty triumph with sacrifice and determination.

At the start of this young century, America looks to the day when the people of the Middle East leave the desert of despotism for the fertile gardens of liberty, and resume their rightful place in a world of peace and prosperity. We look to the day when the nations of that region recognize their greatest resource is not the oil in the ground, but the talent and creativity of their people. We look to the day when moms and dads throughout the Middle East see a future of hope and opportunity for their children. And when that good day comes, the clouds of war will part, the appeal of radicalism will decline, and we will leave our children with a better and safer world.

On this solemn anniversary, we rededicate ourselves to this cause. Our nation has endured trials, and we face a difficult road ahead. Winning this war will require the determined efforts of a unified country, and we must put aside our differences and work together to meet the test that history has given us. We will defeat our enemies. We will protect our people. And we will lead the 21st century into a shining age of human liberty.

Earlier this year, I traveled to the United States Military Academy. I was there to deliver the commencement address to the first class to arrive at West Point after the attacks of September the 11th. That day I met a proud mom named RoseEllen Dowdell. She was there to watch her son, Patrick, accept his commission in the finest Army the world has ever known. A few weeks earlier, RoseEllen had watched her other son, James, graduate from the Fire Academy in New York City. On both these days, her thoughts turned to someone who was not there to share the

moment: her husband, Kevin Dowdell. Kevin was one of the 343 firefighters who rushed to the burning towers of the World Trade Center on September the 11th -- and never came home. His sons lost their father that day, but not the passion for service he instilled in them. Here is what RoseEllen says about her boys: "As a mother, I cross my fingers and pray all the time for their safety -- but as worried as I am, I'm also proud, and I know their dad would be, too."

Our nation is blessed to have young Americans like these -- and we will need them. Dangerous enemies have declared their intention to destroy our way of life. They're not the first to try, and their fate will be the same as those who tried before. Nine-Eleven showed us why. The attacks were meant to bring us to our knees, and they did, but not in the way the terrorists intended. Americans united in prayer, came to the aid of neighbors in need, and resolved that our enemies would not have the last word. The spirit of our people is the source of America's strength. And we go forward with trust in that spirit, confidence in our purpose, and faith in a loving God who made us to be free.

Thank you, and may God bless you.

Rice Cautious About Iranian Nuclear Proposal

Iran reportedly offers temporary suspension of its nuclear program

By David Shelby

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington - Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice remains cautious about a reported proposal from Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities for two months in an effort to return to negotiations with the international community over its nuclear program, but said that if Iran is prepared to suspend its activities, the international community is prepared to engage in discussions.

"I don't think there is an offer ... at this point," Rice told reporters en route to Halifax, Nova Scotia, September 11. "And the point is there would have to be a suspension. If there is a suspension, then we can have discussions, but there has to be a suspension. And as far as I know, the Iranians have not yet said that they would suspend prior to negotiations, which is what the issue has been."

The International Atomic Energy Agency and the U.N. Security Council repeatedly have called on Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment activities immediately and return to negotiations on its nuclear program.

Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, reportedly

floated the idea of a temporary suspension to European Union negotiator Javier Solana during September 9-10 meetings in Vienna, Austria. The two are meeting to discuss Iran's response to a package of incentives from China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States designed to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

The package of incentives includes technological and economic assistance in exchange for Iran's cooperation, but promises an escalating set of sanctions if Iran refuses to comply with the central demand that it suspend its nuclear program.

Rice said she had spoken with Solana following his meetings with Larijani but had not heard any concrete Iranian offer on suspension. "[T]he question is: Are they prepared to suspend verifiably so that negotiations can begin? That's the issue," she said.

In the absence of an Iranian suspension, Rice said, the U.N. Security Council would move ahead with a series of sanctions "that are commensurate with Iranian behavior."

"The international community can bring a lot of isolation on Iran, both formally and informally, both through the Security Council and through like-minded states taking action even if the Security Council does not," she said. "The time is coming very soon when we're going to have to vote on a Security Council resolution."

Rice told reporters at a September 12 press conference in Stellarton, Canada, that the foreign ministers from the six countries that offered Iran the package of incentives would meet in New York on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in the coming days "to examine where we are and how we move forward." She said the five permanent members of the Security Council already have put much work into developing a resolution that would impose sanctions on Iran for its continued defiance but that more work must be done.

"I continue to hope that the Iranians are going to take the opportunity put before them, which is to suspend and to begin negotiations," she said. "It's only in that way that we can explore whether there really is an answer to this problem through negotiation."

Iran repeatedly has claimed that its nuclear program is strictly for peaceful civil energy purposes, but many in the international community are concerned that Iran is developing technology that easily could be diverted to producing nuclear weapons. The package of incentives offered to Iran includes international assistance in developing a peaceful civil nuclear program free of any

proliferation risk.

Rice Cites Importance of U.S.-Canada Trade Agenda, Relations

Also hails Canadian troops for fighting Taliban forces in Afghanistan

By Lauren Monsen

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The strong and durable partnership between Canada and the United States "is, first and foremost, rooted in values," says U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Briefing reporters September 12 in Ottawa with Canadian Foreign Minister Peter McKay, and interviewed that same day by Canadian Press reporter Michael Tutton, Rice stressed that the two North American allies have deep bonds that help them work through occasional disagreements, to the benefit of both nations.

She pointed to the recent resolution of a long-standing U.S.-Canada softwood lumber trade dispute as one example of cooperation based on mutual goodwill. That cooperation is more vital than ever, she suggested, in view of the fact that Canada and the United States are each other's leading trade partners.

With a vigorous trade agenda to maintain, the two countries are fully aware of the need to facilitate cross-border commerce and travel, and also to defend their respective territories against terrorism, said Rice. She added that "great progress" has been achieved in "keeping our borders both secure and open" since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against New York and Washington, despite initial fears that stepped-up security measures might inhibit the day-to-day conduct of legitimate business.

Asked about the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2008, she explained that Canadian travelers to the United States would not be required to carry passports at that time. Instead, officials will introduce "a document that can authenticate identity but ... that is relatively cheap and easy to acquire," in order to place the least possible burden on travelers, Rice said. The new travel document will "help to keep the border secure," she said. Rice also promised that new rules about documentation for entering the United States would be issued "very soon."

As she has done on several past occasions, Rice thanked Canadians for generously assisting stranded U.S. travelers

on September 11, 2001, when air traffic temporarily was suspended across the United States. She recalled that Canadian citizens came to the rescue by taking Americans into their homes until travel restrictions were lifted.

In much the same fashion, she said, Canadians rose to the occasion by sending troops to fight alongside U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan, where the September 11 attacks were conceived. The mission in Afghanistan remains critical, she argued, especially since Taliban forces are trying to mount a comeback.

If "we are to try and prevent the 9/11s of the future, we have to fight the terrorists where they are," said Rice. "We can't allow them to re-group and re-gather, and the work that Canada is doing is essential to that fight." She praised Canada's role in helping to stabilize Afghanistan, and affirmed that "we honor the sacrifice and mourn the losses of Canadians" who have died on the battlefield. "I just want to note that this is a noble cause and one that we're going to win," Rice said.

Understanding the Threat from Terrorism Has Helped Undermine It

U.S. contributes significantly to global equilibrium, policy researcher says

By Jane Morse

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Greater understanding of the threat from terrorism has made the world a safer place since the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, says Herbert London, president of the nonpartisan policy research organization Hudson Institute.

During a September 12 webchat with an international audience, London said: "The world is safer after 9/11 in part because we have a better understanding of the Islamofascist threat; in part because we have undermined the al Qaeda network; and, in part because Americans are determined to prevent another 9/11 from occurring."

London also said the U.S. Treasury Department and the National Security Agency "have made great strides in tracking down the illegal flow of terrorist resources."

In London's view, tougher security measures have not compromised personal liberty in the name of fighting terrorism.

"The first responsibility of the president is securing the safety of U.S. citizens," London said. "The balance between security and freedom is always delicate." He said President Abraham Lincoln suspended some legal protections during

the American Civil War (1861-1865). London also said Robert Jackson, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (1941-1954), "once wrote that the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence do not constitute a suicide pact."

"An enemy like Islamofascism is irrational," London said. "Intelligence is critical in this war. So too is public diplomacy. However, the willingness to use force as a last alternative cannot be removed from the calculus."

"The enemy we face is shadowy," London said. "He doesn't have a home base; he doesn't wear uniforms in battle; he hides behind religious ideas and he works his evil deeds outside our line of vision."

U.S. power, on the other hand "is visible, open and transparent," he said. "I'm persuaded we will defeat our enemies in time, but this is likely to be a long and difficult experience."

London acknowledged that of resentment of U.S. national power has flourished in some parts of the world.

"But ask yourself the obvious question," he said. "Would the globe be more stable or less stable if the U.S. retreated behind fortress America? The answer is obvious. The U.S.A. contributes significantly to global equilibrium."

U.S. Treasury Officials Report on Blocking Terrorists' Money

Officials urge other countries' finance ministries to take on security role

Washington -- A "revolution" has taken place in recent years as the U.S. Treasury Department has become integral in matters of international security, according to U.S. officials.

Several Treasury Department officials spoke September 12 before the U.S. Senate Banking Committee about work the department has done to disrupt the finances of terrorists.

Daniel Glaser, a Treasury deputy assistant secretary, said the United States has proven that security no longer is simply the province of law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and defense departments. In his testimony, Glaser said Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence is "the first office of its type in the world." He urged others countries' finance ministries to "become integral components of national security communities."

Glaser said that Treasury has pushed international

standards for designating individuals or entities as money-launderers, terrorist supporters or weapons proliferators through a Financial Action Task Force and through the United Nations.

He said the United States itself has submitted to an evaluation as to how its financial sector adheres to such standards and that it also has participated in assessments of other countries that are "strategically important ... in the campaign against terrorist financing" -- Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Switzerland and Turkey.

Recent strengthening of the international standards, according to Glaser, includes steps to combat illicit use of cash couriers and to improve information on the originators of cross-border wire transfers.

Glaser said that the U.S. Treasury is able to designate a foreign jurisdiction, institution, or type of account or transaction as a money-laundering concern, thereby allowing punitive measures ranging from recordkeeping requirements to termination of financial accounts with the designated target. Due to cooperation with other countries, such targets can be reported to the U.N. Security Council, which can designate them for financial isolation by 191 member states. In 2005, some 18 nations submitted names for the U.N. Security Council's consideration, according to Glaser.

Earlier in 2006, Treasury held a dialogue with bankers and regulators from the Middle East/North Africa region on international standards and plans a similar discussion in Latin America in early 2007.

To date, the Treasury Department has designated 375 individuals or entities as involved in terrorism. According to Adam Szubin, the director of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, who also spoke to the Senate panel, more than two-thirds of those targets are associated with either al Qaida or the Taliban.

Earlier in September, Treasury designated Bayt al-Mal and Yousser Company, which are financial institutions that functioned as Hezbollah's unofficial treasury in Lebanon.

U.S. Hopes To Raise U.N. Reform, Human Rights at U.N. Meeting

Opening of General Assembly to be preceded by events on literacy, migration

By Stephen Kaufman

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The Bush administration is placing management reform and human rights at the top of its

agenda for the upcoming session of the United Nations General Assembly and hopes to gain assurances from the organization as to its use of member resources, as well as direct its attention to critical human rights situations around the world.

In a September 12 interview with the Washington File, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Kristen Silverberg said management reform at the United Nations remains a "key priority," and echoed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's view that reform will be a main factor in the decision of whose candidacy the United States will support for the position of the next U.N. secretary-general. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's five-year term expires December 31.

"The United States spends throughout the U.N. system over \$5 billion a year, which is a significant part of our budget to work on development and humanitarian assistance," Silverberg said. "We want some assurance that that investment is a wise one for the U.S. taxpayer, and that it actually is resulting in some improvements on the ground in developing countries, for people who are suffering from human rights abuses, [and] for people who are at risk of communicable disease."

The next U.N. secretary-general should be someone "who has a commitment and the skills necessary to drive the reform agenda in the future," Silverberg said.

She said the Bush administration wants to ensure that the U.N. is "holding itself to the highest ethical standards" and is "focused on the oversight of member state resources." The organization also needs to complete its review of ongoing programs to evaluate their utility and effectiveness.

In 2005, the United States asked Secretary-General Kofi Annan to identify and catalogue all existing programs that the U.N. secretariat has been mandated to implement by the Security Council.

"They came up with some 9,000 mandates, many of which date essentially from the founding of the U.N.," Silverberg said. The General Assembly should look at the performance of those mandates and programs to see "whether they are still serving an important purpose, whether they're being administered effectively, [and] whether they take the right approach in solving problems."

The assistant secretary welcomed the establishment of a U.N. ethics office and changes in financial disclosure rules, as well as the strengthening of its oversight office over the past year. However, she said the mandate review process remains "incomplete."

"It's still possible for the General Assembly to take positive action on this, but they really need to show some progress in the near future," she said.

NEW HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL A DISAPPOINTMENT THUS FAR

Silverberg also said the United States thinks it is important that the General Assembly and the newly created Human Rights Council pay attention to critical human rights situations in countries such as Burma, North Korea and Cuba, rather than what she described as the council's "unconstructive focus on Israel."

"We've been pretty disappointed by the performance to date of the new Human Rights Council in Geneva. But there is a real opportunity to work in the General Assembly ... to call attention to some of the key critical human rights crises in the world, and so we're going to do that at as an important priority in the [General Assembly]."

She added that when member states act decisively, "the General Assembly can call attention to human rights issues, and it can be a very powerful message to an oppressive regime to hear that a universal body like the General Assembly has condemned its actions."

However, the council has "gotten off to a very bad start," she said, and the United States remains undecided about joining due to disappointment over the council's "lack of attention to some of the really pressing human rights problems we see in the world."

Regarding the situation in Burma, Silverberg said the United States formally has requested that the Security Council include the issue on its agenda for the coming month, saying the long-standing human rights problems there now have resulted in regional consequences. Citing a report by former Czech President Vaclav Havel and South African Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, she said the flow of refugees from Burma is causing instability, drug trafficking, human trafficking and the spread of communicable diseases.

"We are going to be discussing this actively in New York during the General Assembly and then we think the council will need to take action later this fall," she said.

LITERACY, MIGRATION EVENTS TO PRECEDE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Silverberg said first lady Laura Bush is hosting a literacy conference in conjunction with the General Assembly to which she has invited other leaders' spouses, ministers of

education and educational experts. The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which runs many international literacy programs, also will be participating.

Silverberg said the event will highlight U.S. efforts to promote literacy and help encourage other countries on the issue. The promotion of global literacy "underlies a lot of things on our international agenda," she said, because literate populations are more likely to develop to be economically successful, and literacy is key to developing a thriving democracy.

"Democracy depends on an informed population that can hold its elected officials accountable, and you can't do that without a population that can read," she said.

It is also essential to focus on women's literacy, she added. "There's no better predictor of a child's chances of becoming literate than whether his or her mother is literate."

The United Nations also will hold an event on migration ahead of the General Assembly, and Silverberg said it would be an opportunity to emphasize that the United States continues to strongly support immigration and international visitors.

"There's a lot of misunderstanding about the U.S. record on visa issues. There's an impression that the country is hostile to immigrants," she said. "We really need to get the message out that most Americans continue to strongly support immigration and to want the U.S. to be a place where people visit and where legal immigrants choose to live long term."

REDUCING REGULATORY BARRIERS WILL FACILITATE MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE GOALS

The Bush administration continues to "strongly support" the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals for developing countries, and Silverberg said the goals "have to be met with concerted action." But she tied the issue to the need for management reform, citing "overlap and duplication" within the U.N. system that reduce its effectiveness. The organization also needs to partner with host developing countries and focus on policy conditions on the ground, she said.

"It's not sufficient for the international community, for donor countries, to continue to contribute foreign aid without paying attention to whether there's a policy environment in the country that can help make that foreign aid effective. Namely, are there policies that invite foreign investment, that invite trade? Are there policies that can

help encourage the growth of small business?" she asked.

A priority for the United States in the coming General Assembly will be to get U.N. programs to address regulatory barriers that are hindering business creation and development.

"So many businesses in the developing world operate in the informal economy, so they operate outside of the tax system or outside of the credit system or without property registration," she said. The United Nations needs to "work with countries to create the conditions on the ground that really help small businesses grow and flourish."

The United Nations is "doing some good work" in the area of development, but she said there is "a lot we can do to make U.N. development programs more effective and better contributors towards reaching the Millennium Development goals."

Pluralistic Democracy Protects Religious Freedom

Religious neutrality focus of Democracy Dialogues online discussion

By Carolee Walker

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Men and women are moral agents with the freedom to make their own moral and religious choices, said Stephen V. Monsma, a political scientist and former Michigan state lawmaker, in a Democracy Dialogues webchat September 12.

Pluralism of religious belief is universal, Monsma asserted.

Even within the world's great religions, such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity, Monsma said, there are different traditions or groups, and other minority religions always are present.

"If government is to be respectful of all believers and not favor one over the other," Monsma said, "there should not be one state religion that is favored over all others."

In the United States, where the First Amendment of the Constitution protects the separation of church and state, some Americans think the Supreme Court goes too far in enforcing the separation, but most agree that even the slightest violation of strict separation will lead to more serious violations in the future.

"Not everyone thinks or believes the same way, and this is especially true in regard to religion," Monsma said. "Democracy is pluralism." The task of a pluralist

democracy, then, is to protect the freedom of all persons to practice their religious beliefs and to be neutral toward all religions, neither favoring nor disfavoring any particular religion or religious belief, he said.

Yet people often disagree on exactly what "government neutrality toward religion" means in concrete situations.

For example, most European governments stress cooperative efforts between church and state rather than separating them, often directly funding religious-based schools, according to Monsma.

Church-state separation, or government neutrality toward religion, is not necessarily based on a secular worldview, Monsma said. Under governmental religious neutrality, according to Monsma, religion is honored because no one is coerced to believe, or even pressured to believe, in anything.

The arrival of new immigrant groups does not change how the United States protects separation of church and state, Monsma said.

Problems can arise, however, if there are religious groups that have values that run counter to basic human rights. "Questions such as the rights of women could arise, in the case of a religious group that severely restricts the role of women in society," Monsma suggested. "Or if a religious group should advocate violence, that too would raise problems."

There is no legal requirement that a U.S. president must believe in God, Monsma said, and although the U.S. Constitution explicitly states that there can be no religious test for holding public office, there are also no laws prohibiting a political party that is founded on a religion or named after a religion, such as Christian Democratic parties in many European countries.

Yet no U.S. president ever has publicly stated he did not believe in God, added Monsma, who said public opinion polls regularly show most Americans stating that they would be unlikely to vote for an atheist president. "This no doubt grows out of the fact that the American people are a very religious people -- some 40 percent attend religious services every week and in a recent poll 84 percent reported they had prayed to God in the previous seven days."

Governmental neutrality on matters of religion should be the goal of a government, Monsma said, and church-state separation is only one means to that goal rather than a goal or valued principle in its own right.

The global trend toward greater religious freedom, or

neutrality on matters of religion, is a good thing, asserted Monsma, but there is still enough religious persecution around the world, with governments enforcing one religion over another, to cause concern.

"All persons, whether deeply religious themselves or not, should work for greater religious freedom. I am convinced doing so will, in the long run, lead to stronger, more robust religious faith and also stronger, more creative societies," Monsma said.

Monsma is a research fellow at the Henry Institute for the Study of Religion and Politics at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a nonresident fellow at the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Monsma served in the Michigan House of Representatives and state Senate.

Transcript: State Department Deputy Spokesman's Daily Briefing

Tom Casey briefs reporters September 12

U.S. Department of State
Daily Press Briefing Index
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Briefer: Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

- Formation of National Unity Government/US Commends President Abbas
- Quartet Call for a Palestinian Authority Government that Meets Specific Criteria/US Mindful of Humanitarian Needs of Palestinian People/Issue of US Assistance to Government/Quartet Criteria Clear on Evaluating Palestinian Government

SYRIA

- Terrorist Attack on US Embassy/Response by Syrian Authorities
- Use of Improvised Explosives/Attacker in Syrian Custody
- Status of US Embassy in Damascus/Security at Facility
- Terrorism Worldwide Problem/Violence in Region/Syria is State US Concern for Syrian Continued Support of Terrorism
- US at Forefront of Bringing Peace to Region

MR. CASEY: Okay, good afternoon, everyone. Pleasure to be here. Please to see all of you. I don't have any opening statements, so why don't we go right to your questions.

Barry.

QUESTION: Tom, there's several things. But one that's interesting certainly is efforts are proceeding apparently positively to form a unity government between the various -- among the various Palestinian factions. And I wondered if the U.S. must be watching this carefully. Do you have any, you know, interim appraisal, assessment of what's going on? Evidently, according to the Hamas spokesman, it leaves -- it would make room not only for Hamas but the popular Fund for the Liberation of Palestine, Islamic Jihad and several other groups that are listed by the State Department unfavorably. Do you have any comment on this development?

MR. CASEY: Well, let me talk to you a little bit about what we know and also what we don't know about this plan.

First of all, we want to commend Palestinian President Abbas for the efforts he's made to break the impasse that have been presented by the Hamas Government, which certainly has failed to govern responsibly and failed to fulfill the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

We haven't yet, Barry, seen the details of the agreement on the formation of the Government of National Unity or equally importantly the political platform which that government's going to be charged with implementing.

However, what I can say is from what we've seen so far, we are certainly concerned that the National Unity Government does not appear to meet the Quartet's call for a Palestinian Authority Government that meets specific criteria that we've outlined before which includes renouncing terrorism and violence, recognizing Israel, and accepting all the previous agreements between the parties, and certainly that would include the roadmap. And it's important, obviously, that those criteria be met so that there can be a Palestinian partner for peace.

As you know, too, we're continuing to be mindful of the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, and that's why we are continuing to work despite the concerns that we've had about how this particular Hamas-led Government has acted to maintain and, in fact, increase our assistance to the Palestinian people. And by present count, we are at \$468 million in direct assistance this year. So we're going to continue to look at this, but I think that's our initial view at this point.

QUESTION: Some of the accounts of the reporting is cast in terms of, you know, an effort to resume, to re-open full blown U.S. assistance. I mean, you know, there's economic problems in the Palestinian territories, heavens knows, and this has been cast as that kind of an effort. Can you say anything about restoration of U.S. aid? Does it depend, as

apparently political recognition does, on their meeting the conditions the Quartet roadmap conditions?

MR. CASEY: Well, Barry, let's be clear about --

QUESTION: I mean, aid to the Authority.

MR. CASEY: Well, we're doing it where we are. Yeah, again, we have an extensive aid package for the humanitarian and economic needs of the Palestinian people that has been increased over time in this year as you've seen.

In terms of assistance to the government itself, I -- obviously, the United States has made it clear, as has the Quartet, what kind of actions we want to see the government take. I just mentioned the specific conditions for you and, obviously, nothing can move forward until such time is there's a government in place that does meet that criteria and that would, therefore, be a reasonable partner for peace for Israel.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Does the possibility of Hamas belonging to a government that accepts the idea of a state in Gaza and the West Bank and, therefore, implicitly recognizes Israel, is that enough for the United States to judge the conditions have been met?

MR. CASEY: Look, I -- you know, I think what we need to do is deal with what's actually in the platform that that government is charged with implementing. Once we see that, then we can make an evaluation. But at this point I really don't want to play a speculation game on what if this, what if that. We need to see the full package. We need to see what's there. We'll evaluate it based on the Quartet criteria and then we'll be able to respond in a more definitive way.

Nicholas.

QUESTION: Can we change the subject?

QUESTION: No.

MR. CASEY: Guess that's a no. Go ahead, Sue.

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on what's -- anyway, do you have any comment on the Israeli court's decision to call for the release of the Hamas leaders who were arrested after the soldiers were kidnapped?

MR. CASEY: I actually hadn't seen reporting on that decision, Sue, so we'll try and get you something for that

later.

QUESTION: Do you have any inside knowledge whether the release by Israel of some -- several of Hamas people, I guess, is the beginning of some exchange that would bring the Israeli -- the kidnapped Israeli home?

MR. CASEY: Barry, again, I really don't have anything for you on it. In terms of the motivations of the Israeli courts, I'd leave it to them to tell you about it.

QUESTION: I just wondered.

MR. CASEY: Yeah. Sue, do you want to --

QUESTION: Yeah, one more thing. Hamas --

MR. CASEY: Same subject?

QUESTION: Same subject. Hamas indicated that they were willing to accept previous agreements. And I just wonder whether that was, as far as you see it, the sort of beginning of their possible sort of acceptance of Israel? Do you see that as a positive thing or how do you view that?

MR. CASEY: Look, I think --

QUESTION: Is it an opening?

MR. CASEY: The best way I can characterize it is the Quartet's made the criteria clear on which we're evaluating any Palestinian Authority government. Obviously, any movement in that direction is positive, but we need to see all those criteria met before you can really talk about having a valid partner for peace in the region.

Nicholas, do we want to move over to you and then --

QUESTION: Yeah. Can you tell us what you know about the attack in Syria and more specifically in addition to what we know about what the Syrian authorities did, was DS at all involved with this at the Embassy, the Regional Security Office, at all?

MR. CASEY: Well, let me -- I think there is still a lot of questions unanswered about this attack this morning, but let me try and walk you through what we do know at this point. At approximately 10:10 local time -- that would be about 3:10 our time here in Washington -- you had at least four attackers in two vehicles proceed with this attack on the Embassy. They were using improvised explosives and gunfire.

In terms of casualties, we certainly have no American personnel at the Embassy who were injured and there was

no breach of the security perimeter of the Embassy either. All our personnel at this point have been accounted for as well as all their family members and are safe.

We did unfortunately have one of our local Embassy guards, who was outside the building who was checking vehicles as part of his duties, suffer a gunshot wound. He is in stable condition in the hospital and we'll be checking in on him. We had another one of our guards that also suffered a minor injury but has not been hospitalized.

The attackers, from what we know at this point, as I said, were driving in two vehicles with explosives, coming one at the front entrance of the Embassy and one towards the rear of the compound. The vehicle near the front of the compound did in fact explode. The other wasn't detonated and that was ultimately a -- the explosive materials in it were defused by Syrian authorities.

Three of the attackers were killed. One was injured and I understand is in Syrian custody now. And there are reports of additional civilian casualties at the scene but, unfortunately, I don't have any kind of numbers to offer you on that. And that's something I think the Syrian authorities would be in the best position to report on.

At the moment, they are in a position where the Embassy is closed to the public and will be on reduced staffing for today and tomorrow. I think you've seen there's a Warden Message that's gone out to the American community as well talking about what we think appropriate responses for the American community ought to be.

Following the attack, I should also note that there were some small unexploded improvised explosive devices that were found in the area around the Embassy in addition to those that were inside the second vehicle. They were also successfully removed and defused by the Syrian authorities.

So I think that's the basics of what we know at this point. Again, yes, Syrian authorities did respond to this attack and I think you've heard from Secretary Rice saying we're appreciative of their professional response in this effort. Obviously, the Embassy security personnel both local contract guards, Marine security guards and the Diplomatic Security representatives there, our Regional Security Officer were all in responding to this incident. In terms of actual, you know, specific steps or actions, I really don't have that level of detail to share with you.

QUESTION: It is being said that the vehicle out front did not breach the security parameters and you said that that car actually did explode.

MR. CASEY: Right.

QUESTION: So then do you attribute the fact that it didn't really do any damage to the Embassy itself because of these new regulations DS has in terms of where the barriers are and how far from the Embassy they are?

MR. CASEY: Well, look, again I think we're too early in the sort of investigation and after action report of this to start drawing conclusions about it. Obviously, we spend a tremendous amount of effort, and we spend a good deal of our resources, too, in trying to make sure our diplomatic facilities are as secure as can possibly be. And one thing that this attack does is, I think, serves as a reminder of the fact that terrorism is a worldwide problem, that it does strike places where you wouldn't necessarily think are the most obvious or logical places for it to occur.

And it also puts into perspective, Nicholas, the fact that so many of our officials working overseas, both our Foreign Service Officers and Specialists, our Foreign Service Nationals, really are placing themselves in potential danger to represent the American people and to carry out the important diplomatic assignments that we have. And I know everyone from the Secretary on down truly appreciates the work they're doing under often dangerous circumstances, and that's why we spend so much time and energy and effort trying to make sure that our facilities and our people are secure.

QUESTION: Tom, you talked about local authorities. These -- the Syrian police or whoever they were who got involved and actually in the shootout, is your understanding that they have policemen, police people in the area all the time, or how did they happen to just be there at the same time?

MR. CASEY: I -- the response, as I understand it, was not instantaneous, that the word was received of the attack and then they responded as quickly as possible. I don't know. I assume, as is often the case, that there are some security measures taken by local authorities and, therefore, might have been some security personnel in the area. But given the nature of this attack, it required something of a larger response to deal with. We do believe that they did respond quickly and appropriately to this attack once word came out of it.

James.

QUESTION: Tom, I want to ask to see if you can clarify some of the things you've said about this just now.

MR. CASEY: Sure.

QUESTION: You made reference to improvised explosives. Are you distinguishing -- are you making a distinction between improvised explosives and grenades, per se?

MR. CASEY: Yeah, I know there have been reports about grenades versus IEDs. In point of fact, I used improvised explosives, James, simply because I think it's still unclear. We know that there were improvised explosives both involved in the vehicle that did explode as well as the one that didn't. We know that there were, as I mentioned, some small improvised explosive devices that were found in the area, not in either of the vehicles. I can't confirm for you at this point that there were in fact grenades used in this attack. That's something there have been shifting reports on, and I'd like to make sure that we have it absolutely right before I tell you definitively one way or the other.

QUESTION: But you are certain, then, that these were improvised explosives, the ones you are referring to?

MR. CASEY: Yes.

QUESTION: And by improvised explosives, do you care to tell us kind of what you mean, like Molotov cocktails or home made bomb devices of some kind?

MR. CASEY: You know, I think my understanding is we're looking at the kind of things that were explosives and designed to create damage either the facilities or to individuals in the area. The exact nature or composition of them I just don't have.

QUESTION: Two last ones if you would, please.

MR. CASEY: Sure.

QUESTION: Can you -- do you have any information about the nature of sidearms or firearms that the attackers had on their possession?

MR. CASEY: Got me on that one, James. No, I don't know. I'm sure as we continue with our investigation on this and as we hear additionally from Syrian authorities we'll get a better idea. But I just don't have that level of detail right now.

QUESTION: I only ask because you mentioned gunfire earlier.

MR. CASEY: Okay.

QUESTION: And lastly, you mentioned that three of the attackers were killed, one of them was injured and you said is in Syrian custody.

MR. CASEY: That's correct.

QUESTION: Do we have any assessment of the condition that that detainee is in?

MR. CASEY: No, I don't. I do not know the extent of the individual's injuries, and I don't know at this point whether they are detained in hospital or in a broader facility. That's, again, just a level of detail at this point that I don't have for you.

QUESTION: Thanks.

QUESTION: Do you have a notion of who did this?

MR. CASEY: No, Barry. And I think you probably heard from the Secretary on this as well up in Canada this morning.

QUESTION: Right. Well, that was a few hours ago.

MR. CASEY: At this point, we're still where she left it. The attack's under investigation, and I don't think it's appropriate at this point to speculate on it. Clearly, it was an organized terrorist attack on our Embassy, but exactly who was responsible for it and, you know, who they might be affiliated with, what their motives are, are things that we'll just have to look at as the days go on.

QUESTION: Could I ask you, and it may be far too early for this, do you have any sense that this is as much an attack on the Syrian Government? There have been -- there's speculation that this is an Islamic group and the Syrian Government is aggressively secular or it has been for many years.

MR. CASEY: Yeah, Barry, at this point I don't just have any information that would confirm that or would move you away from it either.

Charlie.

QUESTION: Yes. Do you know if the Syrians are looking for any other people who might have been involved in the attack? Do they think they have everybody who was involved? And also can you describe the Embassy and whether or not it met the Inman requirements or meets the Inman requirements?

MR. CASEY: Okay. First one. First pieces first. The -- in terms of the number of attackers, we're only aware of those four individuals being directly involved in the attack at this point. However, again, we're at a very early stage in the investigation on this. I'm certainly not ruling out for you that there were others involved in this and certainly think

that one of the important questions as well is in addition to those who actually carried out this attack, what other individuals might have been involved in the organization and planning of it. But again, I don't have any real information to share with you. These are all things that are important for us to look at as we investigate it.

On -- in terms of your second question on Inman building requirements, I have to say I'm not up on the details of the specific structure that our embassy's in there. I will find out for you if it in fact is a new or more new embassy that was put in place after those standards were done.

The one thing that I think, though, is important for you and everyone else to remember is that even in those instances where we have not had the opportunity yet to construct a new embassy that is in accordance with those particular standards, which include things like a 100-foot setback and others that you're familiar with, we have obviously taken measures throughout the world, but certainly in countries or in regions where we have security concerns -- and ongoing security concerns -- to strengthen and harden our security means. And we're looking at it every day in terms of what we can do to ensure better protection of our officials. I will find out for you that specific question. Let me --

QUESTION: As a corollary to finding out the other -- because I doubt you would know this -- can you find out specifically if, without being specific, whether these measures to harden this embassy had been taken?

MR. CASEY: Well, I think, you know, I can certainly assure that we have upgraded our security not only at the Embassy in Damascus, but at all embassies since 9/11. That's an obvious one. Certainly, we don't talk about the specifics involved there. But, you know, I can guarantee you that that embassy's done things over the past few years to improve its security as all our embassies have.

Elise.

QUESTION: After the attacks, Syria's Embassy in Washington just recently released a statement. I'm not sure if you saw it. But it accused the United States of fueling extremism, terrorism and anti-U.S. sentiment in the Middle East; suggesting, if you will, that the U.S. is kind of responsible for incurring this attack. I mean, what's your response to that?

MR. CASEY: Well, I haven't seen -- I haven't seen the statement. What I do think is true is what the President talked about last night and what we've been talking about for some time, particularly in the lead up to yesterday's anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. We are very much in an

ongoing conflict with terrorists, with those who espouse an ideology of hate, an ideology that is antithetical and that believes that a open, democratic system is absolutely the opposite of what they want to see happen. That's why they are so adamantly opposed to efforts to bring democracy to the Middle East. That's why they are so adamantly opposed to efforts to reform countries within the Middle East or elsewhere.

You know, I'd want to point out too, when you look at what is it that these people stand for. If you look at the message that came from al-Qaida, that came from Zawahiri a couple of days ago, who is it that he is citing as the enemy? I don't think there was anyone that wasn't cited as the enemy -- all governments in the region, all governments in the Gulf, UNIFIL, you know. I think you have to take a look at who is really responsible for the violence in the region. The violence is the responsibility of those who do believe that the only response to any questions or concerns is to throw bombs, is to shoot bullets, is to assassinate people.

We've got, I think, a real change in some of the reactions that we are seeing to the kind of comments that al-Qaida's made over the last few days and weeks and I think we'll expect to. I don't think there is anyone in the Middle East who you will talk to, among honest good-willed people that support this kind of rhetoric, that support this kind of violence. And I would certainly reject the notion that the United States, the international community or anyone working to help bring prosperity, to help bring peace and to help bring democracy to the Middle East is the cause of violence. It's clearly the opposite way.

Yeah.

QUESTION: A quick follow-up. On the other hand, while you say that the U.S. isn't responsible for incurring it, do you think that the Syrian Government bears any responsibility for tolerating an atmosphere where Islamic extremism is encouraged?

MR. CASEY: Well, look, I think one thing that's clear -- first of all, again, I want to acknowledge the fact that in this instance, Syrian security forces did respond appropriately and professionally, and we do appreciate that as the Secretary said.

Certainly, though, in terms of our concerns about Syria, they're well known and I don't think need much elaboration, but we continue to be concerned about the fact that Syria is a state sponsor of terror, that it has allowed radical groups to find a haven and find a home in terms of their leadership inside the country. That is something that they bear responsibility for. I certainly am not trying to link it directly to this incident or to anything else specific but,

again, our concerns about Syria's support for terrorist groups are well known.

Let's go over here to Michele, and then I'll come back down to you, Sue.

QUESTION: How will this affect U.S.-Syrian relations?

MR. CASEY: It's hard to say, Michele. I don't think I have any particular judgment to offer you on it. Again, we very much appreciate that Syrian forces responded professionally and appropriately to this incident. In terms of our broader relationship with Syria, again, I think we've spoken to that. There are many issues that are out there that we want to see the Syrian Government take action on including issues related to their support to terror. Certainly, those broader concerns haven't changed as a result of this particular incident.

QUESTION: Can we expect the return of the American Ambassador to Syria soon?

MR. CASEY: I have nothing new to offer you on that subject, sorry. Sue.

QUESTION: An Annapolis based security company, which provided supplies and various security to the Embassy in Damascus, is saying that up to 50 people were -- tried to attack the Embassy today. That's the figure that they're giving. They also say that the attackers were -- had pipe bombs strapped to propane tanks. Have you heard any of that?

MR. CASEY: No, I honestly haven't. Again, what we have, and I think it's important not only with this incident but with anything like this that we deal with the facts that we know. And at this point, all we can say for certain is that we had four attackers and two vehicles. And I think as we go forward and look at this we'll get more details later. But I certainly don't have anything to bear that out.

Kirit.

QUESTION: I'm just trying to clarify two more details on the attack itself. Can you tell us the types of vehicles that were used and then also any timeline on the attacks? Were they simultaneous that they drove up at the same or was there a delay?

MR. CASEY: I don't think that would be a good ad for a car company to say your vehicles were used in a terrorist attack. No, honestly I do not have specifics on the, you know, make or model or types of vehicles involved.

Let's go --

QUESTION: On the timeline? Do you have anything on the timeline? If they drove up at the same time, was there a delay of a half-hour or --

MR. CASEY: Again, my understanding was the two vehicles approached the Embassy at approximately the same time and that the, you know, events started at approximately 10:10 local, which would be 3:10 eastern standard. But in terms of a timeline of how this was carried out, no, I don't have that, and I think that's something that's not only part of the investigation but part of an overall after-action assessment that I think will take some time to produce.

QUESTION: Were they vans or cars, is I think what Kirit wanted to know.

QUESTION: Right. I mean --

QUESTION: It's not a case of brand names.

MR. CASEY: Yeah. No, I don't, James. I honestly don't have sort of size and type of the vehicle at this point. Nicholas.

QUESTION: Was there any damage done to the building as far as you know?

MR. CASEY: Nothing major and nothing significant enough to breach the perimeter. I'm sure there is some peripheral damage, but I don't have a full assessment of that at this point.

QUESTION: And just another one. Do you know if the four individuals have been identified?

MR. CASEY: Not to the best of my knowledge. I think that's something that the Syrians are still looking at.

QUESTION: Okay. And the fourth one, who was not killed but was arrested, is the U.S. seeking access to him?

MR. CASEY: I'm sure we'll be talking to the Syrian Government about this. I'm not sure at this point what specific plans are. Again, I think our primary response at this point was to make sure we'd secured the facility and our people. And then again as the investigation proceeds, we'll determine what an appropriate response is in terms of getting information from the individual involved.

Let's go to you, sir.

QUESTION: If you can explain to me the objectivity of

mentioning Syria being a state sponsor of terrorism when Syria has been exposed to so many attacks, terrorist attacks since the years of 1980s through this attack and many others before that. I mean, this is a country that is suffering -- has been suffering from terrorism and has called for, you know, a definition of what terrorism is.

And also I hear the statement from the Syrian Embassy that my colleague has referred to as blaming actually the United States for what's been happening in Iraq and Lebanon recently, for -- that these acts are exacerbating the terrorism in the area, making it much worse situation and has asked the Syrian Embassy's release -- press release here is talking about that the U.S., if you'll allow me to read just a couple of lines: The U.S. should take this opportunity to review the policies in the Middle East, its policies in the Middle East and start looking at the root causes of terrorism and broker a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

MR. CASEY: Yeah, thanks. And I appreciate that word from our sponsor. But let me make a couple of things clear. First of all, our concerns about Syrian support for terrorism are again longstanding and well known. Syria allows the leaders of radical groups to base themselves out of Damascus. Syria provides and helps provide a pathway for weapons and material and other support down into Hezbollah. Syria has been responsible for some rather tragic incidents in Lebanon in addition to its occupation of Lebanon over the years. I think my response to that press release would be to invite the Syrian Government to once again, as we have so often in the past, evaluate its policies and determine whether in fact its continued support for terrorism is, in fact, an appropriate way to proceed.

Again, as this incident shows today, there is no boundary in terms of terrorist action. Terrorists can strike anyone anywhere. We've seen it happen in many countries throughout the world. I think what we would like to do is see the Syrian Government, and all those who have had relationships with terrorist groups, to end those relationships and to join with us and the rest of the international community in opposing these terrorists and in helping to bring about a peaceful resolution of any of the conflicts that are there in the region.

I would also again say that the United States has been at the forefront of trying to bring peace to the Middle East certainly to try and help resolve the Israeli-Palestinian situation. It was through the successful diplomatic efforts of Secretary Rice and others that we were also able to achieve a ceasefire and achieve a settlement exemplified in Resolution 1701 of the fighting in Lebanon. And again, I think what we are doing is trying to promote a positive agenda, an agenda that helps support the interests of the people in the region. And if we're looking for Syria to take

actions or looking for Syria to do an evaluation of its policies, I'd against ask them to consider changing their behavior before they start talking about having us do so.

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